

Review: SOUTHERN REAPPRAISALS

Reviewed Work(s): *The Cast-Iron Man: John C. Calhoun and American Democracy* by Arthur Styron; *Hugh Swinton Legaré: A Charleston Intellectual* by Linda Rhea; *Roger B. Taney* by Carl Brent Swisher; *Lucius Q. C. Lamar* by Wirt Armistead Cate  
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BY H. C. NIXON

THE old South, with its political leaders, becomes an inviting field for the cultivation of biography as discussion of both politics and biography comes increasingly into vogue. Moreover, it is important sport to re-examine the society of the old South in the light of the glaring imperfections which have become palpably manifest in the social system that rode to victory over the South. The attorneys for the defense of the old South and its civilization seem entitled to a new day in court, since American industrial capitalism, which overthrew slavery with a moral argument, has in turn been stripped of much of its own seeming saintliness. The lives of many Southerners may with profit

*The Cast-Iron Man: John C. Calhoun and American Democracy.* By Arthur Styron. New York: Longmans, Green and Company. \$3.50. *Hugh Swinton Legaré: A Charleston Intellectual.* By Linda Rhea. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. \$3.00. *Roger B. Taney.* By Carl Brent Swisher. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$5.00. *Lucius Q. C. Lamar.* By Wirt Armistead Cate. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. \$5.00.

be reconsidered, though precautions should be taken against claiming too much for them.

Arthur Styron extracts the title, "The Cast-Iron Man," for his book on Calhoun from Harriet Martineau's observation, "Calhoun, the cast-iron man, who looks as if he had never been born, and never could be extinguished." In broad sweeps of style and method, he presents this Southern nationalist, turned sectionalist, as a tragic figure not only in American democracy but in the intellectual and political cosmos. Nothing is too large or too small, too near or too far, for Mr. Styron's purposes. He touches on the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, other revolutions, Napoleon's international diplomacy, Karl Marx as a "competent psychologist," changes in the style of women's hats, and the American political scene, with a psychograph of Lincoln and a roll call of literary figures, domestic and foreign, some active in Calhoun's time, some "dead or dying." One has to hunt for Calhoun in this miscellaneous array as if looking for a lost child at a circus. The author remains somewhat immune from Calhoun's cogency of statement. He manages to say in a "Postscript" that Calhoun opposed in vain "a universal cash-register evaluation of life," that he was "the last spokesman of the great school of the Eighteenth Century."

Dr. Rhea has prepared a compact factual biography, "Hugh Swinton Legaré," which is a sympathetic but critical story of a Charleston intellectual, of a good family, with Huguenot and Scotch background. Legaré, though frail of body and living only to the age of forty-six, had a full career as a writer, magazine editor, state legislator, state attorney general, chargé d'affaires in Belgium, Congressman, Attorney General in Tyler's cabinet, with bits of private legal practice thrown in. Though considered an advocate of State rights, he opposed the Calhoun views on Nullification, was sent to Belgium by the Andrew Jackson administration, and later became a Whig convert. He saw the gross ine-

qualities of wealth, with its accumulation in few hands, as a result of the use of steam and machinery, and emphasized the point in a speech in Congress in 1837.

The biographer adopts a happy perspective in giving substantial space and attention to Legaré's activities as a Southern magazine contributor and editor, especially his connections with the Southern Review. Southern writing was distinctly on an amateur basis in those times, and Southern literary centers were graveyards for magazines. In spite of these difficulties, Legaré was a Southern gentleman whose literary avocation loomed large in comparison with his vocation. He was not one of the political giants of his time and section, but it is good to have this interesting picture of him as a man of broad interests and culture.

"Roger B. Taney" is a lucid interpretation by Professor Swisher, of Columbia University, who has made extensive use of manuscript, documentary, and monographic material in an objective manner. Taney started political life as a Federalist, became a Jacksonian Democrat, and, as Chief Justice, played a rôle which was significant for more reasons than the Dred Scott decision. He was a lawyer of ability, sprung from an old landed family of Maryland, and he held his own in the party battles of the Jackson period. His part in the fight on the United States Bank as Attorney General and as Secretary of the Treasury is reappraised and presented with freshness. There was a consistency in his seeming shifts of view. "Property in land and mortgages," says Mr. Swisher, "the kind of property with which Taney had been most familiar as a product of a plantation country, had for him a sanctity not possessed by interloper corporations or by liquid wealth in the hands of banking and mercantile classes." On the bench he carried on the Marshall tradition of extending protection to property but reversed the tradition as to the kind of property to be protected, invoking the "due process" clause of the Fifth Amendment against Federal legislation on slavery. Yet he attempted a constitu-

tional interpretation in favor of human rights, deviating from laissez-faire doctrine "to the extent of justifying state laws needed by local communities but opposed by conservative interests."

This moving account of a public career does not reflect blindness to Taney's shortcomings, but it is an upward revision of his place in history. It explains him in the light of the Southern environment, culture, and way of life. It is an avowed revision of the estimates of Burgess, Rhodes, Channing, McMaster, Bassett, and others. It is an important work.

Wirt Armistead Cate has put the results of extensive research into his "Lucius Q. C. Lamar," the liberal-minded statesman of secession and reunion. Mr. Cate gives us facts, plenty of facts, with many of them bundled into parenthetical baggage and forming an impediment to the style and story. Lamar had a brilliant intellect, a gifted personality, and a stirring career, which would seem to justify a more lively biography than Mr. Cate has written.

This work is a substantial contribution, though the author "found particularly helpful Edward Mayes' 'Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches.'" In addition to covering Lamar's college days and his public life in Legislature, Congress, Senate, Confederate diplomacy, Cleveland's Cabinet, and the Supreme Court, Mr. Cate portrays him as an interpreter of social forces in American history, as the forerunner both of Frederick Jackson Turner and Henry W. Grady. There is no room to question the significance which Mr. Cate attaches to Lamar as a prophet of the new South and the new nation. However, one might like to see more evidence than Mr. Cate's categorical paragraph on Lamar's interpretation of the significance of the frontier. There were many precursors of Turner, including Emerson, Godkin, Henry George, and James Bryce, but no one of these attained Turner's completeness of interpretation. Did Lamar?